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ABSTRACT

This booklet discusses students who are gifted and at risk of school failure. The different types of problems gifted children face and ways to identify if they are at risk are reviewed. Checklists are provided for teachers of gifted students, regular classroom teachers and counselors, and parents of gifted students to assist in the identification of risk characteristics. The booklet also describes school, home, college, and community strategies for building resiliency in gifted students to keep them from becoming at risk. Information on school strategies includes a discussion of the global, kinesthetic, or tactual learning styles of most gifted students. Some teaching strategies discussed are to step out of the traditional mold, rethink the classroom, restructure tests, be flexible, provide independent learning time and assistance, use more manipulatives, create hands-on classrooms that allow much more movement, and allow gifted students to take charge of their learning. Parent strategies include reading aloud, reading together, providing access to information, nurturing intense interests, ensuring children do regular homework and participate in school activities, and ensuring gifted and non-gifted siblings assume equal roles in family routines. Contains 24 references. (CR)

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Gifted and At Risk

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Lorraine Taylor Mains and Mary Jane Guiteras Reeves first realized the parallels between gifted students and at-risk students in 1991. After much research and planning, they developed a workshop, "Not me . . . I'm Gifted," on which this fastback is based.

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Series Editor, Dongvan R. Walling

Gifted and at Risk

by
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The Meaning of "Gifted and at Risk"

A reasonable first question is: At risk of what? For gifted students in particular, the risks are many, starting with alienation and isolation from peers. Gifted students often are perceived as "different" and so may be rejected by other students. When that happens often or over a prolonged period, feelings of alienation or isolation may move such students to adopt behaviors that are self-destructive: school failure, experimentation with or abuse of drugs or alcohol, recklessness, sexual experimentation, or suicide.

Other factors also may place gifted students at risk, such as frustration with methods of instruction or the pace of learning and negative self-esteem.

Why Some Gifted Students Are at Risk

America's best and brightest young people sometimes are among the students most at risk. In the typical classroom, the teacher's job is to take a large group of students and to make certain that each student learns

a predetermined curriculum. The teacher attempts to grab the students' attention, motivate them to learn, account for how their time is spent, provide worksheets, test to see what has been learned, reteach when necessary, and retest. Rarely does a teacher have time to discover whether some students already know the material or whether some have caught on quickly and need to move on.

Many gifted students' learning styles do not match this standard pace. The knowledgeable, self-motivated, active, eager, intense, independent, fast-learning student can feel stifled in the typical classroom. The slow pace and rigid time blocks employed for the majority of the class frustrate the student who learns quickly and wants to explore, create, and perfect. The creative, divergent-thinking gifted student who does not always give the expected response can befuddle the teacher and the class. The student who knows more about the subject than the teacher can be threatening. Other gifted students are kinesthetic or tactual learners and become at-risk when teachers fail to teach to these learning style strengths.

Gifted students usually have many wonderful qualities. But for all their good qualities, they can be difficult to teach, sometimes difficult to like. In the classroom, their propensity to question the rules and challenge the answers can be infuriating. The student who takes a day to finish a project that the teacher has scheduled to take a week can cause the teacher extra work. Conversely, the student who wants to dig into a project and take a week when the teacher has scheduled a day can put a kink in

a carefully crafted schedule. The student who bucks the system and refuses to do repetitious seatwork can lead a rebellion. Vibrant and animated gifted students stir up a class.

Other students sometimes view the highly verbal student who has all the answers and asks all the questions as the "teacher's pet." They may resent the student who learns easily, finishes work quickly, and always has the highest grade. And they sometimes avoid the adult-like student to whom they cannot relate. Consequently, many gifted students suffer from low self-esteem that comes from feeling isolated.

In fact, most gifted students have lower self-esteem than their peers. Gifted students can be extraordinarily sensitive and perceptive but frequently are nonconformists. In other words, many gifted students care about what others think about them and are perceptive enough to see what others are thinking, but they do not do the things necessary to meld into the group. Other gifted students try to hide their gifts in order to blend in.

Gifted students who are frustrated in school may demonstrate their frustrations by tuning out or acting out, behaviors that place them at greater risk of drug and alcohol use, dropping out, eating disorders, depression, suicide, and teen pregnancy — all of which are commonly found among disaffected or alienated gifted students.

Types of Gifted Students

Following are some types of gifted students and the kinds of problems to which they may be prone:

Divergent thinkers can have self-esteem problems when they provide answers that are logical to them but seem unusual and off-the-wall to their classmates. Low self-esteem also can result because the gifted sometimes have only a small number of understanding peers from whom to choose friends.

Perfectionists may exhibit compulsive behaviors because they feel as though their value comes from their accomplishments. When their accomplishments do not live up to expectations — their own, their parents', or their teacher's — anxiety and feelings of inadequacy arise. When other students do not live up to the gifted student's high standards, alienation is probable.

Sensitive students who also are gifted may become depressed easily. Such students often are more aware of their surroundings, more aware of their differences, and more aware of their painful differences from their peers.

Creative, high achievers often feel isolated, weird, and depressed. Depressed youth are subject to anxiety, insomnia or hypersomnia, feelings of worthlessness, loss of energy, and decreased ability to concentrate. Students with gifts in creative writing, music, poetry, or dance may be at particular risk, either because they are extraordinarily sensitive or because their needs are unique. Most schools are not prepared to provide appropriate programs for creative students. Because schools do not meet these creative needs, such students often have to shape their own programs on their own time.

Antisocial students, alienated by their differences from peers, may be bored, impatient trouble-makers. When they refuse to do their work or get it done too quickly, they have time to dream up new ways to challenge their teachers and classmates. J. David Hawkins, who co-authored *Preparing for the Drug [Free] Years*, found that aggressive boys in kindergarten through second grade are particularly vulnerable to later drug abuse. But the risk is even greater when gifted boys are shy and withdrawn. About 40% of the students who exhibit antisocial behavior at a young age will develop delinquency or drug problems. Indeed, alienation, rebelliousness, and social isolation are common characteristics among gifted students and non-gifted at-risk youth.

In particular, lack of interest in school in grades 4 through 7 places students at great risk of getting into trouble with drugs. Students who first use drugs at an early age are at greater risk of having drug problems later on. In fact, students who begin to use alcohol or drugs before age 15 are twice as likely to develop problems with addiction than are students who do not use drugs or alcohol until they are older.

Underachievers are at risk. Gifted students can — and often do — fail in spite of their intellectual abilities. Many gifted students do not learn just faster; they learn differently. Those who fail are sometimes in classrooms where the style of teaching does not match their style of learning. Others simply may be bored or angry and refuse to do the work. Gifted students who learned quickly and

easily in elementary school may fail when they reach middle school, high school, or college. Many of these students never have been challenged to learn and consequently lack discipline, study habits, and study skills that are necessary for more advanced learning.

Also, gifted students are not always gifted in every area but often are expected to excel at every activity and in every subject. In fact, most gifted students are underachievers in certain areas; some are underachievers in general for a variety of reasons. Underachieving students tend to be highly critical of themselves and have low self-esteem, and they may attempt to mask such feelings with an attitude of indifference or hostility. Underachievers may be brilliant but easily frustrated because they have little tolerance for class situations in which they must wait for other students to learn what they already have mastered.

Learning disabled students also may be gifted but unrecognized. Attention deficit disorder, dyslexia, hyperactivity, and other learning disorders may mask giftedness. Learning disorders cannot be seen, and the learning disabled student may be perceived simply as "not doing his best." There is some evidence that suggests that ADD students often have divergent thinking skills and can be prone to giftedness.

This compendium is not exhaustive, but it offers a glimpse of the complexity inherent in dealing with gifted students who may be at risk. Many students exhibit multiple characteristics. For example, a student may be a perfectionist in certain areas and a disabled learner in

others, such as the gifted gymnast whose dyslexia hampers his ability in reading. The checklists in the next section will help teachers begin to address many of these problems.

Identifying Gifted Students Who Are at Risk

Following are three checklists that will assist teachers of gifted students, regular classroom teachers and counselors, and parents in identifying students who may be at risk.

A Checklist for Teachers of Gifted Students

Teachers who are able to identify the gifted students who may be at risk can structure activities that will help those students build resiliency against the at-risk factors. Teachers of gifted students should ask themselves the following questions:

- Is the student a loner?
- Does the student feel excluded or unwelcome among peers?
- Have the student's grades gone down during the time he or she has been in the class?
- Does the student seem shy or withdrawn but exhibit occasional outbursts of temper?

- Does the student smoke or use smokeless tobacco?
- Does the student seem to need constant attention?
- Does the student have trouble choosing between academic pursuits and popularity?
- Does the student refuse to do assigned work?
- Are the student's friends generally older than the student?

A "yes" response to several of these questions should signal the teacher to investigate further to determine whether the gifted student truly may be at risk.

A Checklist for Regular Classroom Teachers and Counselors

Sometimes gifted children become at risk because they have not been identified as gifted. For example, gifted students with learning disabilities often are overlooked. Their disabilities overshadow their talents, or teachers mistakenly assume that in order to be "gifted" a student cannot be learning disabled. Other examples of populations where giftedness is often overlooked include: bilingual students or limited-English speakers, nonwhite students in predominantly white schools, and physically handicapped students.

Studying objective criteria — such as comparative characteristics checklists, personality characteristics, creativity tests, learning styles assessments, abilities assessments, and mental processes — and subjective evaluations of original art work can help teachers and counselors identify overlooked gifted students. In many cases, parents will be able to identify giftedness

or at least provide the basis for deciding whether or not to test a student.

The following checklist will help regular classroom teachers and counselors determine if a student may have been overlooked in the identification process.

- Is the student hard to like? Could a teacher's negative feelings toward the student get in the way of identifying the student as gifted?
- Does the student challenge authority? Is he or she loud? Arrogant? Hostile? Cocky? A know-it-all?
- Does the student question assignments or demand a reason for doing assigned work?
- Is the student in a minority group? Bilingual? Learning disabled? Physically handicapped?
- Is the student in a low socioeconomic group?
- Is the student creative without being academically talented?
- Is the student a leader — even in negative ways? Does the student dominate other students?
- Is there a disparity between the student's grades and his or her scores on achievement tests? Does the student do assigned work poorly — or not at all — even though capable?
- Is the student easily bored or angered by worksheets, repetitive tasks, and routine work?
- Does the student show signs of stress: clenched teeth, broken pencils, anger? Does the student rebel physically by slamming doors, breaking things, or slamming books onto the desk?
- Does the student verbally put himself or herself down? Is he or she impatient or self-critical?

- Is the student's work messy? Does it lack attention to details?

Again, "yes" answers to several of these questions should signal a need for further examination. In seeking to identify gifted students, teachers must keep in mind that gifted students do not look alike, sound the same, or behave in the same way. The teacher-pleasing gifted are easy to spot; but their equally gifted peers who are critical, challenging, and difficult to like may not seem gifted to many regular classroom teachers or counselors.

When students show a hint of potential or exhibit many of these characteristics, teachers should consider referring the student for testing. By referring the student to be assessed, they take the first step toward better meeting the student's needs and helping that student to become more resilient.

A Checklist for Parents of Gifted Students

Parents who can identify risk characteristics in their own gifted children may be able to intervene quickly. But first, such parents must know what to look for.

Many parents naively believe that simply providing a comfortable home life and nudging their offspring toward a good college education are sufficient to keep their gifted children risk-free. Unfortunately, the difficulties in which many gifted students find themselves contradict that belief. In particular, some gifted youngsters whose affective and intellectual needs are not met at school or at home are likely to turn to drugs and alcohol.

Following is a checklist for parents of gifted children. As in the previous checklists, "yes" responses signal a need for further inquiry and vigilance. The term *child* applies to every age from kindergarten through high school.

- Does the child seem to dislike himself or herself?
- Does the child dislike being seen or labeled as "gifted"?
- Does the child behave differently than usual in order to belong to a peer group? Does the child break family rules because of peer group expectations?
- Does the child have a history of making unwise choices in social situations?
- Does the child routinely lie or take an attitude of "you can't make me"?
- Is the child withdrawn? Does the child lack someone in the family in whom to confide?
- Does the child spend free time just "hanging out," instead of engaging in active play or other purposeful endeavors?
- Does the child exhibit unexplained anger?
- Has the child's attitude toward alcohol or drugs changed? Does the family have a history of drug or alcohol use or abuse?
- Does the child ask for money more often than in the past?
- Does the child express uncertainty about his or her future? Does the child express the feeling that he or she has no purpose in life?
- Does the child engage in dangerous physical behaviors or stunts?

- Does the child smoke, use smokeless tobacco, or give evidence of having used or experimented with inhalants, such as glue or aerosols?
- Has the child's circle of friends changed recently?
- Does the child often choose friends who are older?
- Is the child failing in school?

Few individual questions are solely indicative of risk, but several are serious danger signals. The more "yes" answers, the more serious the risks are to the gifted child.

Building Resiliency

Keeping gifted students from becoming at risk often is termed "building resiliency." Resiliency means being able to maintain one's psychological or emotional balance in spite of forces or events that are disruptive or disturbing. Gifted students are bombarded by their own expectations and those of their parents, teachers, and peers that often stretch beyond the expectations to which non-gifted students are exposed. Thus the challenge for those who work with gifted students is to help them cope with such pressures and to "bounce back" when they feel overwhelmed.

At School

Teachers who are educated about risk characteristics and knowledgeable about the needs of gifted students can help them resist high-risk lures. Probably the most important issue that teachers can address is the right of all students — including gifted students — to an appropriate education. Students must be taught in the manner by which they can best learn.

Much research has been done and much is known about how students learn and the barriers that inhibit learning for some students. Many students earnestly try to study and learn. But because they do not fit into the traditional school environment and do not understand their own learning strengths and weaknesses, they become frustrated by the educational process. A gifted student — or any other student — who is armed with information about *how* he or she learns most effectively can gain control of his or her learning. Gaining such control builds independent learning capabilities, which, in turn, build resiliency.

A number of inventories can help teachers and students to assess students' capabilities and needs. Two of the best are the Structure of Intellect profile developed by Robert and Mary Meeker and the Learning Styles Inventories developed by Dunn and Dunn. (See Resources.)

Structure of Intellect (SOI) tests identify and measure the intellectual abilities that are necessary for learning different skills. SOI training materials are used to enhance a student's strongest abilities and to develop the student's weaker abilities. Once intelligence is understood as many different abilities and as a quality that can be developed, educators, parents, and students can look at education in a new way.

Dunn and Dunn's *Learning Styles Inventories* examines 21 variables grouped into five categories: environmental, emotional, sociological, physical, and psychological. Research clearly points out that achievement increases, students learn more, and students enjoy learning and re-

member more of what they have learned when individual learning styles are identified and accommodated.

Looking at one aspect of learning styles on a continuum would place analytical learners at one end and global learners at the other. The student who typically is going to be most successful in school tends toward the analytical side. Analytical students, to use a sweeping statement, prefer detailed, step-by-step instructions and learn best in a conventional classroom, in silence, and benefit from bright lighting. These students are persistent and like to continue working until they have completed the assignment. They are less prone to eat or drink while working.

However, according to Dunn and Dunn, the majority of students tend to be global learners. Most under-achievers are global learners, and most gifted students with IQs greater than 145 are global learners. The younger the student, the more likely he or she is to be global. And 50% to 60% of all secondary students are global learners. Again, using a general description, global students need to see the big picture before they hear about the details. They tend to learn best with a little background noise, soft lighting, and in an informal setting. They will tackle one subject briefly before moving on to the next. They prefer to snack while working. And as many as 85% of students who achieve slowly or are having difficulty in school cannot learn successfully analytically but can learn globally.

To take the learning styles approach a step further, gifted students also tend to be kinesthetic or tactual learners. Kinesthetic learners often must have some-

thing moving whenever they are studying, listening, or reading. They will, for example, tap a pencil, swing a leg, or bounce a ball. The kinesthetic learner will be involved in many activities and have a high energy level. The tactual learner needs to take notes. If this student does not take notes, doodle, or use his or her hands in some way, then learning becomes difficult. (It is a sobering statistic that some researchers have discovered that 99% of all dropouts have strong kinesthetic abilities and 88% have strong tactual abilities. These students often drop out because schools fail to teach to their learning style strengths.)

Many of the learning problems that put gifted students at risk arise because most teachers are analytical and most students are global. To learn most effectively, global students need teachers who teach globally and analytical students need teachers who teach analytically. Second, most classrooms do not adapt to meet the needs of most gifted students, who need a lot of movement and a lot of hands-on work in order to learn. When teachers and students with similar learning styles are together in the classroom, the results can be phenomenal.

Educating gifted students demands stepping out of the traditional mold, rethinking the classroom, restructuring tests, being flexible, providing independent learning time and assistance, using many more manipulatives, creating hands-on classrooms that allow much more movement, and sometimes simply allowing the gifted student to take charge of his or her own learning. Such classrooms also require a teacher who is tolerant and encourages active, hands-on learning. Excellent

books are available that help teachers and administrators to design classrooms and to select methods for teaching students with all learning styles. (See Resources.)

In particular, it is important for teachers to realize that many gifted students come from minority backgrounds and then to identify these gifted minority students. This fact may be overlooked, because the parents of African-American and Hispanic students ask that their students be evaluated for gifted classes much less often than do white parents. Also, the usual gifted characteristics checklists and standardized test scores often fail to identify gifted minority students. The previous checklist for regular classroom teachers and counselors provides a good starting point for overcoming this problem of underrepresented minorities in gifted classes.

Administrators can play an important role in helping gifted students become resilient by supporting teachers' efforts to structure learning environments that are compatible with their students' diverse learning styles. High schools often are the first place where gifted students can deviate from a prescribed curriculum and explore new subjects and interests. But elementary and middle schools need to build similar options, not just for gifted students but for all students who will benefit from a nontraditional approach to teaching and learning.

High school teachers and administrators can further encourage their gifted students by giving additional points for honors classes and emphasizing the college credit that can be obtained through taking Advanced Placement courses. Offering pass/fail options can open

doors for all students. The student who is out of sync with his peers will benefit when administrators emphasize that high school graduation is achieved by obtaining a specified number of credits, not through attending a specified number of years. Students also need to know that correspondence courses, Advanced Placement courses, and concurrent credit courses are options.

Numerous studies have shown that when schools have high expectations for all students and provide all students with the support necessary to achieve what is expected, they have high rates of academic success. Gifted students need an emphasis on academics, clear expectations and regulations, a high level of participation in school, and many varied alternative resources, such as libraries, vocational work opportunities, art, music, and extracurricular activities. High expectations with at-risk students have been proven to reduce academic failure and to increase the number of college-bound students. Furthermore, there is a correlation between schools that nurture high self-esteem and have high expectations and a reduction in emotional and behavioral disturbances.

In meeting the special needs of gifted students, administrators must remember that it is not unusual in public schools to have classes where half of the students learn faster than average and half of the students learn slower. Should the student who learns faster stay on the same "track" as the student who learns slower? Special education students receive individualized lesson plans and instruction, and parents have regular meetings and

access to counselors and administrators. Such individualized attention also must be provided for gifted students.

At Home

In order for schools to be effective in building gifted students' resiliency, parents also must be effective. Many gifted students share common personality characteristics and have specific parenting needs related to these characteristics. When these needs are met, gifted students will have greater self-esteem and be better able to resist the lure of cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, and other high-risk behaviors. Successfully parenting a gifted student requires recognizing the traits that are common to gifted students and then recognizing the individuality of each student and customizing parenting to meet that student's particular needs.

Most gifted students are highly sensitive, and for them the home needs to provide encouragement and a safe haven and be a place of genuine warmth and high expectations. Building that atmosphere must begin early and never end. These children can be prone to feelings of isolation and need to feel that there are people who enjoy spending time with them and like them just as they are. They especially need affection that begins during infancy and continues throughout their youth. Children who are shown affection will be more accepting of affection as teens, when they may feel alienated and need comfort the most. Gifted children who feel accepted will have higher self-esteem and the security they need to take positive risks.

Effectively parenting the gifted student requires that parents value their child's gifts. Gifted students can adopt unusual perspectives on life, which result in their being outside the classroom norm. Some may come to feel self-contempt, others may try to hide their gifts to fit in better. Students whose parents value their gifts are more likely to value those gifts themselves and may be less likely to hide them.

Students who think and learn quickly may be impatient with others, including parents and siblings, who are not as quick-witted. Gifted students need to learn how to work with other people, and so it is important that parents and teachers communicate with them respectfully and expect respect in return. Some gifted students simply find spending time alone to be more rewarding than spending time with peers who are not as mature, do not play in the same complex way, or do not share their interests. These students risk social isolation. The gifted student who develops patience with others and learns to impose limits on himself or herself will get along much better socially. Consequently, that student may be less likely to be isolated or to feel rejected by peers.

Gifted students need gifted peers, others like themselves who have similar needs and interests. Parents can meet this need by taking time to foster positive connections. They may have to drive across town or spearhead a new activity in order to help find students who share similar interests and abilities. But the effort will be productive for their gifted child's well-being.

Other ways that parents can help their gifted youngster to grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally include:

- Reading aloud to their children to develop advanced vocabulary and listening skills.
- Reading together to nurture the parent-child relationship.
- Providing access to encyclopedias, reference books, and computers in the home for independent learning.
- Nurturing intense interests, for example, providing a piano teacher if the child has an early interest in learning to play the piano or visiting the local science museum to foster the child's interest in solar energy.
- Ensuring that their children do regular homework and participate in routine school activities so that they do not become isolated from peers.
- Ensuring that gifted children and non-gifted siblings assume equal roles in family routines, such as household chores.

Gifted students are affected negatively when parents' and teachers' expectations increase with each success that the student achieves. It is important for parents and teachers to realize that gifted students are not always gifted at everything. They sometimes have one particular talent or a few areas of giftedness. Even students who seem to be gifted at everything are vulnerable. Regardless of how talented a student is, there will be only one "top" student, only one valedictorian. The gifted student who cannot accept a second-place finish or a poor test grade will feel extraordinary and constant pressures to excel.

Perfectionistic gifted students are likely never to feel fully successful and may avoid taking positive risks because they fear failure. They particularly need parents who encourage them to take chances and who accept the outcome of those chances — even knowing that there will be some failures.

Of course, parents of gifted students must help their students learn how to make good decisions and how to take reasonable risks. Overly protective parents will say, "He's only five" — or nine or sixteen — seemingly unaware that important lessons in life are learned at every age. Parents who shield their child from the consequences of their child's choices can become "enablers" of bad habits and poor choices. For example, parents should encourage and can assist their students with homework. But they should draw the line at doing their children's homework for them. Likewise, they should not make excuses when their children do not want to go to sports practice or pay their youngsters' traffic tickets instead of holding the youngsters responsible for their driving infractions. Such parental actions create negative dependency and, in the long run, can lead the students to avoid personal responsibility, which eventually will translate into codependent anxiety.

Perhaps one of the most important things parents can do to help ensure their students are resilient to risk behaviors is to realize that the example they set will have a much greater effect on their children than will the things they say. It is difficult for students to give credence to warnings about the dangers of high-risk behavior when they see contradictory behavior. A family

that focuses on exercising regularly, eating the right quantities of the right foods, and rejecting smoking, drinking, and the use of illegal drugs models a healthy lifestyle.

Finally, a student who has things to do and places to go will have little interest in self-destructive behaviors. Parents can help students develop a vision of the future by helping them to envision themselves as making a difference in the world. That vision should include the enjoyment of working for and reaching goals. One way that parents can accomplish this task is by asking questions that move their children to dream and to visualize what they need to accomplish in order to realize their dreams. The maturing gifted student who is lonely and out of sync with his peers needs a positive vision of the future.

Much of this parental help naturally depends on parents keeping open the lines of communication between them and their children at every age. Gifted children, like all children, need to be encouraged to talk about school, friends, and dreams. Parents need to ask questions and listen responsively. Parents may need to learn new communications skills in order to create an environment where their children will want to talk. The student who is feeling alone will feel less alone if his or her parents can share some of their own difficulties while growing up. Talking about common problems helps students to see that things change and time heals.

Parents also must remember that gifted students absorb information more quickly than average learners. With that in mind, parents should view television, movies,

videos, and magazines from a student's perspective. What messages is the youngster receiving about alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, diet, suicide, pregnancy, and school behavior? These are topics that should be discussed openly by parents and children.

One good place for such discussion is around the dinner table. A recent study reported in *Reader's Digest* (Wildavsky 1994) showed that 60% of the students who said their whole family sat around a table together for a meal at least four times a week received high scores on the study's test. Only 42% of the students whose family gathered for dinner three or fewer times a week received similar high scores. While such studies are hardly conclusive, they do point to the obvious: Strong, connected families in which communication is a priority help students see themselves as valued, accepted individuals, which may lead to greater motivation in school and better integration with peers.

The student who is gifted and learning disabled, physically handicapped, or non-English speaking needs parents who are educated about giftedness and their child's particular challenges. These parents must know that specialized teachers, such as special education teachers, may not have training in working with gifted students. Learning disabled or physically handicapped gifted students will benefit most from school if their parents work with the school to achieve equitable, individualized learning programs that meet their needs. School, of course, can foster this collaboration by providing parenting information for this population.

Finally, parents can be school volunteers, join parent-teacher organizations, and get to know the teachers.

Having a good relationship with the school, the principal, and the teachers will be a big help when students are feeling left out of the group or when they need to have an individualized lesson plan. This holds true especially when families move and students change schools. At those times, parents must take a particularly active role in seeking out those within the school who can provide for a smooth transition for their gifted children.

There may be good reasons to keep gifted elementary students with their peers. By the time gifted students are in high school classes, they should be able to accelerate academically in ways that are more flexible and less likely to produce alienation.

Gifted students who are mature, handle academic stress well, and want to take a heavier course load may be able to do so within the school day. Or they may take correspondence courses or summer school. These students should consider taking Advanced Placement and concurrent credit courses when they are available. Advanced Placement courses allow students to take an exam after completing a high school class, and after obtaining a passing grade, to receive college credit. Concurrent courses are taken at a nearby college and allow students to receive high school and college credit concurrently. In some cases, gifted students have opted out of the final year or two of high school, taken the graduate equivalency exam (GED), and started college early.

Some gifted students founder on the shoals of career choice. Parents, teachers, and counselors can provide new perspectives. Parents may be able to tap their own

professional networks for mentors and advisors to answer their gifted children's questions. Teachers and counselors can provide listening ears and assist students to locate information. Library guides about careers, interest inventories, and online services can all be helpful. School professionals can establish peer groups to discuss career interests and college choices.

In particular, gifted students may need help identifying their career interests, strengths, and weaknesses. These students may require assistance to narrow their range of interests and to focus on those pursuits in which they likely will find success and fulfillment. An excellent resource is Tieger and Barron-Tieger's book, *Do What You Are* (See Resources). This resource helps young people identify their personality type and find career directions that match their personality.

At College

College is a new world for most students. Few, including gifted students, are prepared for the challenges, the decisions, and the independence. Many gifted students lack the study skills and personal discipline college demands. The gifted student who has "breezed" through high school and lacks experience in studying should consider taking a study skills course or camp before tackling the first semester of college. Similarly, students who have not demonstrated good skills in making decisions may want to consider postponing college to spend a year or two in the working world. Work experience can allow students to explore options, set career goals, and mature.

Attending a commuter college close to home is another good option for the less mature student who needs the psychological and social support of home and a familiar community. Commuter colleges allow students to gradually leave the security of their home environment. Still other gifted students will benefit from working part time while attending college. Various studies have shown that working up to 20 hours per week (half time) can have a positive effect on students' college grades.

Risk of school failure or worse does not end with high school graduation. Gifted students are no less vulnerable than other students to the rigors of college life. Indeed, some gifted students have been accelerated in elementary and secondary schools and are younger than their freshman peers, which makes these students more vulnerable to the excesses in behavior that newfound freedom at college encourages. For example, rarely do parents and students realize how much and how often alcohol is consumed on college campuses. Few consider the degree to which it can affect a student's future. Many college freshmen come from homes where they can count on their parents to wake them up, send them off to school, and set curfews. In the college environment, students must make these decisions for themselves. The gifted student who is unable to handle this new freedom and who parties every night and is too hung over to go to class the next morning will have a rude awakening at semester's end. Dreams of medical school, law school, or politics can be lost forever.

All of the problems to which elementary and secondary gifted students are susceptible — depression,

suicide, underachievement, eating disorders, dropping out, teen pregnancy — may be magnified in the less structured environment of the college or university campus. Thus, in order to prevent future problems, a strong collaboration between schools, parents, and colleges should be fostered. Such collaboration can build information and support bridges that will help keep gifted students from becoming at risk during the transition.

In the Community

Families, churches, and the larger community must take roles in raising healthy, productive citizens. The risks that communities can prevent or address affect all young people, regardless of their gifts.

Communities need to be aware of ways in which they enable students to take negative risks. Research shows that students who never smoke are less likely to take illegal drugs, and the young adult who reaches age 20 without smoking is unlikely to ever start. Society's goal should be to keep students from experimenting with "gateway" drugs for as long as possible. Cigarettes, inhalants, and alcohol are the gateway drugs that may lead to more serious substance abuse.

Community members can work together to ban cigarette vending machines that are accessible by minors and to prohibit sales of aerosols and other inhalants to minors. Police officers can shut down retailers who sell alcohol and cigarettes to minors. Laws can be established that make it illegal for minors to possess cigarettes. Fines can be established for students who are caught smoking

and greater fines established for parents who provide cigarettes and alcohol.

Perhaps even more important, communities can help raise resilient students by having high standards and clearly understood community norms. All segments of the community — parents, schools, churches, business people — must send consistent messages about right and wrong, about acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Community messages that are conveyed through personal examples, community projects, stated expectations, laws, and regulations help to develop community norms that are clear to all.

There are no easy answers to the problems that may put gifted students at risk. But parents and educators can take fresh approaches to students and schools, learn from what has been proven to work, apply new methods consistently, and break free of the barriers that stifle creativity and discourage clear thinking. Gifted students are too important to the future of American education, government, arts, and science to be trapped by frustrations and lost to addictions. Effective gifted education cannot be merely an afterthought, nor can the risks to which many gifted students are exposed be left to chance responses.

This fastback gives educators starting points for addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted students at risk. The Resources section that follows provides additional sources of information.

Resources

Books and Articles

- Clark, Barbara. *Growing Up Gifted*. 3rd ed. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1983.
- Clark, Barbara. *Optimizing Learning*. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1983.
- Delisle, James R. *Gifted Children Speak Out*. New York: Walker, 1984.
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- Englander-Golden, Paula, and Satir, Virginia. *Say It Straight: From Compulsions to Choices*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Science and Behavior Books, 1990.
- Fox, Lynn H.; Brody, Linda; and Tobin, D., eds. *Learning Disabled Gifted Children: Identification and Programming*. Baltimore: University Park Press, 1983.
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- Hawkins, J. David, et al. *Preparing for the Drug [Free] Years*. 2nd ed. Developmental Research and Programs; Roberts, Fitzmahane & Associates; and Comprehensive Health Education Foundation, 1988.
- Kaufmann, Felice. *Your Gifted Child and You*. Rev. ed. Reston, Va.: Council for Exceptional Children, 1981.
- Kerr, Barbara A. *Smart Girls, Gifted Women*. Columbus: Ohio Psychology, 1986.
- Mains, Lorraine Taylor, and Reeves, Mary Jane. *Not Me — I'm Gifted*. Amarillo, Texas, 1991.
- Tieger, Paul D., and Barron-Tieger, Barbara. *Do What You Are*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1992.
- Van Tassel-Baska, Joyce. *A Practical Guide to Counseling the Gifted in a School Setting*. Reston, Va.: Council for Exceptional Students, 1983.
- Webb, James, et al. *Guiding the Gifted Student: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers*. Columbus: Ohio Psychology, 1982.
- Wildavsky, Rachel. "What's Behind Success in Schools." *Reader's Digest* (October 1994).
- Wilmes, David. *Parenting for Prevention*. Minneapolis: Johnson Institute, 1981.
- Wolin, Steven J., and Wolin, Sybil. *The Resilient Self*. New York: Villard Books, 1993.

Periodicals

- G/C/T Magazine*. P.O. Box 6448, Mobile, AL 36660.
- Gifted Child Quarterly*. NAGT, 4175 Lovell Road, Box 30, Suite 140, Circle Pines, MN 55014.
- Gifted Children Monthly*. P.O. Box 7200, Bergenfield, NJ 07621.
- Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091.

SOI News. SOI (Structure of Intellect) Systems, 45755
Goodpasture Road, Vida, OR 97488. (503) 896-3936.

Phi Delta Kappa Fastbacks

Two annual series, published each spring and fall, offer fastbacks on a wide range of educational topics. Each fastback is intended to be a focused, authoritative treatment of a topic of current interest to educators and other readers. Several hundred fastbacks have been published since the program began in 1972, many of which are still in print. Among the topics are:

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The Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation was established on 13 October 1966 with the signing, by Dr. George H. Reavis, of the irrevocable trust agreement creating the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation Trust.

George H. Reavis (1883-1970) entered the education profession after graduating from Warrensburg Missouri State Teachers College in 1906 and the University of Missouri in 1911. He went on to earn an M.A. and a Ph.D. at Columbia University. Dr. Reavis served as assistant superintendent of schools in Maryland and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1929 he was appointed director of instruction for the Ohio State Department of Education. But it was as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Cincinnati public schools (1939-48) that he rose to national prominence.

Dr. Reavis' dream for the Educational Foundation was to make it possible for seasoned educators to write and publish the wisdom they had acquired over a lifetime of professional activity. He wanted educators and the general public to "better understand (1) the nature of the educative process and (2) the relation of education to human welfare."

The Phi Delta Kappa fastbacks were begun in 1972. These publications, along with monographs and books on a wide range of topics related to education, are the realization of that dream.